

# The Salt Lake Tribune

## Thinking Ahead Eases Concerns About Growth

By Kevin Fayles (24 Feb. 08)

Utahns are by nature optimistic. Even in trying circumstances, we see possibilities, not obstacles. With that attitude we built a world-class community and a thriving economy from a desert.

For generations, growth has been our mantra. But recent research indicates that enthusiasm for growth is waning.

In 1997, Envision Utah commissioned a study of Utah's values and attitudes about growth. At that time, residents rated their own quality of life as 7.3 on a 10-point scale, and projected that it would improve to 8.2 on that scale within five years. Both results exceeded the national average.

Last fall, when asked the same question, Utahns rated their personal quality of life as 6.4, expecting it to rise to 7.3 by 2012. This study reveals that Utahns still see life getting better in the future, but their optimism has tempered and is now on par with the national average.

Other results indicate that Utahns have become increasingly concerned about growth and its impacts:

- \* 48 percent believe growth should be encouraged (down from 56 percent in 1997).
- \* 58 percent of Utahns believe new companies moving into the state do more to improve than hurt the quality of life in Utah (down from 80 percent in 1997).
- \* Only 36 percent (down from 55 percent) believe future growth will make things better.

These trends are telling. They reflect a public concerned about how growth will affect aspects of their daily lives - convenience, affordability, mobility, recreation and health. Nevertheless, for many, these attitudes may reflect concerns with how growth occurs and not necessarily with growth itself.

As the facilitator of several public processes, Envision Utah has learned that attitudes about growth are related to the level of opportunity residents have to voice their preferences. That is, people are much more supportive of growth if it's guided by principles they favor.

They recognize that we do better when we begin with the end in mind, thinking ahead to the type of community we want to create. Not surprisingly, they support more housing, transportation and employment options that will make life more affordable, protect the places they love and allow more time to spend with family and other priorities.

The recently completed Vision Dixie process in Washington County is one example of a community pulling together to protect its high quality of life and to provide more opportunities for the next generation. More than 3,000 residents helped create principles to guide local decisions. (See [www.visiondixie.org](http://www.visiondixie.org))

Utahns are understandably wary of the unintended consequences of haphazard growth. By contrast, quality growth - guided by public values, open civic processes, proven strategies and sound market projections - can create the exemplary communities we want for our kids. Working together, we can, and should, be optimistic.

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\* KEVIN FAYLES is community relations manager of the Coalition for Utah's Future, a sponsor of Envision Utah.